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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes that the key to a quality graduate organizational behavior education is developing skills and a critical analytical student attitude for evaluating organizational behavior research. The appropriateness of this attitude and skill development with different student populations are discussed, and guidelines proposed for developing these in a classroom setting. Organizational behavior courses are designed to meet the following criteria: (1) to motivate the students by making the subject material relevant to them, and to "turn them on" during the first session to organizational behavior; (2) to develop skills and critical analytical student attitudes for evaluating organizational behavior research; and (3) to provide a comprehensive macro-micro organizational behavior course sequence. The methods to accomplish these criteria are outlined and discussed. (Author)

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ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR GRADUATE COURSE

ADMINISTRATION IN ENGINEERING, SYSTEMS, AND LOGISTICS PROGRAMS

William H. Hendrix

Air Force Institute of Technology

The Air Force Institute of Technology as the Air Force's graduate school is concerned with providing education for Department of Defense employees and selected allied military and civilian personnel. The various programs are designed to provide quality graduate education adapted to the unique needs of the military. The Air Force Institute of Technology is composed of three resident schools and an office for the Civilian Institution Programs. The three resident schools are the Schools of Civil Engineering, Engineering, and Systems and Logistics. The Civilian Institution Programs is responsible for administering personnel assigned to civilian universities for graduate study not provided by the resident schools.

The Department of Organizational Sciences within the School of Systems and Logistics provides organizational behavior and management courses for programs conducted by the three resident schools. Each program has a different focus and somewhat unique needs when compared to the other programs. The students are somewhat different than those typically found taking organizational behavior courses in departments of psychology and business in civilian colleges and universities. Within civilian universities it appears that students generally have selected majors related to the area of organizational behavior and, therefore, have a basic interest in the subject matter. On the other hand, students assigned to AFIT programs frequently have little interest in

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In O. Brown, Jr., (chair), Organizational behavior as a function of institutional needs. Symposium presented at the 89th American Psychological Association Convention, August 1981.

organizational behavior. Instead, their interests lie with subjects such as those dealing with engineering, logistics, and systems management. Typically, the students have a superficial exposure to underlying organizational behavior concepts gained through college courses in psychology and business or through Air Force professional development schools. With this superficial knowledge they frequently feel they know all they need to know, or that the subject area is really not important when compared to their primary area of interest. Therefore, in teaching organizational behavior within AFIT the professor is challenged daily to assure that the material is made relevant to the student population.

With this background, organization behavior courses are designed within AFIT to meet the following criteria: (a) to motivate the students by making the subject material relevant to them, and to "turn them on" during the first session to organizational behavior, (b) to develop skills and critical analytical student attitude for evaluating organizational behavior research, and (c) to provide a comprehensive macro-micro organizational behavior course sequence.

In meeting these criteria each professor follows a general syllabus, but tailors the class presentation to meet his needs. Motivating the students during the first session can take various forms. One example is the introduction of stress research and stress management which provides the opportunity to tie organizational factors and personality factors to effectiveness and to coronary heart disease. Some dramatic relationships can be presented that students can relate to and can really get involved in. This makes OB very personal for them, not just some theory.

In meeting the second criterion, developing skills and positive attitudes for evaluating OB research, an introductory research analysis lecture/ discussion period is presented which tailors research methodology to organizational behavior evaluation problems. This approach stresses that for a model to have utility it generally must be testable. If not testable it cannot be proved or disproved. Also, that which is intuitively obvious is frequently not true, and therefore there is a need to test hypotheses - not just hypothesize them and then implement them. Toward that end OB problems are presented and various approaches offered.

The approaches presented start with very simple straight-forward, intuitively obvious, approaches which are discussed showing the weaknesses and why other approaches are better. For example, for a pretest, posttest design with an intervention program a t-test on the pre-posttest data would be offered as a solution with one factor being evaluated. The design problem of no control group would be explored and then gain scores would be proposed. In turn, the disadvantages of gain scores would lead to a discussion on use of analysis of covariance and the problem of multiple tests on a series of pre-posttest factors found in many survey research efforts. The results of this class session would set the stage for the remaining course. As each model is presented throughout the course it is analyzed for its weaknesses and strengths as well as the research designs used to test it in the literature.

The third criterion, to provide a comprehensive macro-micro organizational behavior course sequence has varied over time. At one time a single five hour course containing both macro and micro organizational perspectives was the primary thrust. Later two courses, one dealing with macro organizational behavior and the other with micro organizational behavior. This provided a

better basis for providing comprehensive organizational behavior coverage. Nevertheless, the basic approach taken for both of the major configurations has been a systems approach with macro and micro organizational behavior components forming a part of the system which links to desired organizational outcomes. These outcomes, such as productivity, climate, satisfaction, and turnover are reviewed and provide a basis throughout the course for evaluation of each major area covered, its associated series of models, and relevant research.

To provide a comprehensive program with depth, major topic areas and models are presented with class discussion and analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the area, model, and research performed. Key topic areas are made more relevant and reinforced by experiential exercises which are critiqued by the class to establish short comings of the exercise, such as relevant factors not considered. Each student, in addition, selects for in depth study one of a series of topic areas. The final product is a comprehensive literature review followed by a critique of the research area.

This systems approach with macro and micro perspectives focusing on desired organizational outcomes provides AFIT with a useful framework for teaching organizational behavior. This framework combined with an emphasis for testing models and evaluating research assists in developing skills and critical student attitude in evaluating organizational behavior research.

This program provides AFIT a means for accomplishing its organizational behavior course criteria of: (a) motivating students through making the subject matter relevant, (b) developing student critical analytical skills, and (c) providing a comprehensive graduate level organizational behavior curriculum.